NEW SOLUTIONS AND INNOVATIVE ADAPTATIONS: PASSENGER AIRCRAFT UTILIZATION AMIDST COVID-19

News / Business aviation

As the COVID-19 swept through the industry many airlines were trying to sustain their daily operations as demand for passenger flights hit an all-time lows in March and April of 2020. While some carriers resorted to lay-offs, operations' downscaling and restructuring of their business, major passenger airlines explored a new service – cargo transportation on passenger aircraft later known as "preighters".

During the first days of travel bans and social distancing orders coming into effect, European carriers Lufthansa, Swiss, Air France and British Airways modified their passenger aircraft by removing economy seats from multiple airplanes to be able to transport heavier and larger loads of PPE.

"The modified "preighters" were not chosen randomly. The aircraft were due to be deep cleaned or have their on board product refitted to a newer one, thus the carriers had to carry out future work earlier than expected to have an opportunity to support their business during financially difficult times to any aerospace company around the globe. FL Technics has already completed several modifications for passenger aircraft like removing seats and installing cargo nets on floors and installing solutions for cargo transportation on passenger seats for a wide range of narrow and wide body aircraft. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these kind of conversions more popular when compared to pre-crisis period, we believe that the demand for these kind of retrofits will keep growth for the upcoming years as the airlines will try to keep as much aircraft in their fleet as possible to emerge from COVID-19 with the same capacity which was available pre-COVID,"

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commented Liudas Jurkonis, Head of Engineering and Training at FL Technics.

Since the negatively impacted cash flow affected not only major airlines and companies, smaller airlines and private charter companies had to innovate differently than carriers with fleets of 100-200 aircraft. KlasJet, a European private business charter company, “has greatly benefited from the lease of 737 freighter aircraft nicknamed Merlin,” according to the company’s CEO Rita Domkute.

“Merlin is a truly majestic integrator aircraft connecting major cargo hubs to smaller local airports. Since our pilots are trained extensively and are certified to land in airfields located around mountainous terrain, we found a niche where we can offer flexible services, where our smaller aircraft arrive at closer or cheaper airports, which allows us to drive down the overall cost of transportation from point A to point B when compared to bigger industry players. Additionally, our acquisition of Boeing 737 freighter has led us to welcome experienced aviation professionals into our team to expand our cargo possibilities. Currently, our team consists of top notch professionals with previous working experience coming from major companies like British Airways and others. We are also very fortunate to be a part of Avia Solutions Group since other more cargo focused companies found in the group provide us with valuable know-how and current market trends, helping KlasJet to adapt to ever changing industry trends and excel in our cargo service offering.” – Added Vaidotas Sukstulis, Deputy Director of Flight Operations at KlasJet.

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